

Locals told me that they had experienced some very hot days a few weeks before, which would have been around the time the larva of this butterfly was pupating. The adult coloration in this species is not nearly so sensitive to the effect of extreme temperature during the early pupal stage as is, say, *Argynnis paphia* L., in which species hot days at pupation regularly result in melanic adults. However it seems most likely that this was the reason behind the appearance of my strange butterfly.

Before finally leaving the island at 10pm I sat and watched the light fade. Though still cloudy the last light had taken on a curious, almost luminous quality. The green grass which covered several small islands in the bay was now of a remarkably intense hue and the sand dunes stretching away along the coast seemed to give out on a pale, ethereal glow. The water that lay in ripples on the sand, or ran across it in small streams reflected, more brightly than seemed possible, the darkening sky. There were Curlews calling and probing the sand alongside small huddles of Oyster Catchers. Not a human sound could be heard. The previous year I had watched a fox walking on the shore just where I was sitting now, quite intent on its business of hunting down crabs under the sea weed. It would prod and nip before grabbing and quickly crushing them. I remembered this and was sorry not to see it again. Sitting there then, Chris Yates' words came to mind. This was "earthing the current".

Finally, at the risk of labouring a point, I might add one further quote on the theme of this piece. It was written by no less a man than the great Charles Darwin who had been a fanatical beetle-hunter in his youth. In old age he reflected on those days that had been filled with the thrilling promise of rare finds and judged them to have been among the best of his life. Despite the great achievements of his later years he never forgot that sense of excitement and once wrote to a friend, "Whenever I hear of the capture of rare beetles, I feel like an old war horse at the sound of a trumpet". In this sentiment, if in nothing else, I feel that Charles Darwin and I might have understood one another.

I must express my gratitude to Donald Russwurm who, with great generosity, included in his suggestion that I write this piece an offer to finance the colour plate that accompanies it.

The melanic forms of *Acronicta leporina* L. (Lep.: Noctuidae) in the London area

The prevalent form of *A. leporina* in Britain has for over one-hundred years been *f. grisea* Cochrane in which the forewings are sprinkled with black scales to present a pale to medium-grey background, and in this the ground colour of London specimens has remained no darker than that in specimens from much of the rest of Britain. Thus there has been no extreme melanistic trend as exhibited by *ab. melanocephala* Mansbridge which occurred on Chat Moss and the Liverpool and Manchester areas, or *ab. nigra* Tutt, the extreme black form.

However, a less extreme melanic form has occurred very sparingly in north-west Kent; this is ab. *melaleuca* Culot which is darkish-grey with the usual markings, but with the addition of a whitish fascia basal to the postmedian line and adjacent to it. On 20 June 1976 a specimen of this form attended my garden m.v. light at Dartford, agreeing precisely with Culot's description and figure. Chalmers-Hunt (1965, *Butterflies and Moths of Kent*, Sup. in *Ent. Rec.* 77: 259) mentions a specimen of *melaleuca* also taken at Dartford by Mr Honeybourne and later deposited in the National Collection, but which I have failed to find there. However, within a series of f. *grisea* in that collection is a *melaleuca* from nearby Orpington, dated 7 July 1956. Kettlewell (1973, *The Evolution of Melanism*) makes no comment of this form, but gives one example as recorded for Deptford, Kent; I suspect this is a misprint for Dartford, probably referring to the 1955 specimen. It is interesting that the only *melaleuca* recorded are from this very limited area of north-west Kent, and that it appears to be so rare; secondly that the London area has not produced the more extreme melanic forms.

Although f. *grisea* (*brasyporina* Treits.) is not included in Kettlewell's list of melanics, it certainly is an adaptation to the atmospheric pollution and darkened environment of much of Britain during the Industrial Revolution. Chalmers-Hunt (*op. cit.*) details the development of f. *grisea*, already noticed in the woodlands of north-west Kent by 1829, to its total replacement of the typical form.

A further melanic trend is portrayed in the uncommon ab. *semivirga* Tutt in which the forewing beyond the postmedian line is considerably darkened giving a banded appearance; it is accurately figured in Newman (1874, *An Illustrated Natural History of British Moths*).— B.K. WEST, 36 Briar Road, Dartford, Kent DA5 2HN.

Is the Humming-bird Hawk-moth *Macroglossum stellatarum* (L.) (Lep.: Sphingidae) resident in Britain?

It is always very difficult to know whether or not a migrant from warmer parts of the world can survive the British winter. If one is discovered in January or February there is always the possibility that it has just migrated, rather than survived since the previous summer. I can offer no more than circumstantial evidence, but begin to be convinced that the Humming-bird Hawk-moth, can persist.

For the past 14 years, I have visited a garden at Churchill in Somerset, usually for brief periods, and each year I have recorded *M. stellatarum*. There is much Red Valerian *Centranthus rubra* in the garden at which the adult moths feed and are easily observed. The garden is in a sheltered valley in the Mendips where bedstraw *Galium* sp. is plentiful. In most years moths have been observed from June onwards. Surely fourteen consecutive years in the same locality is too much of a coincidence for migration to be the source every year.— DAVID AGASSIZ, St Andrew's School, Turi, Private Bag, Molo, KENYA.